

1 Abstract and Summary

The purpose of this environmental assessment is to consider the impacts of implementing various long- term fire and fuel management alternatives in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks (hereinafter called the parks). While each alternative presents a different path for the fire program, they all address the parks' goals of restoring and maintaining fire as a key ecosystem process while minimizing the threat to lives, property, cultural, and natural resources in a cost effective manner.

In addition to providing information required by law and the 2001 Federal Fire Policy, this environmental assessment will respond to the primary issues of concern raised during a series of internal and public scoping sessions.

This assessment analyzes four alternatives developed by an interdisciplinary planning team:

- Alternative 1 – No Action –(Current Program)
- Alternative 2 – Prescribed Fire Dominated
- Alternative 3 – Wildland Fire Use Dominated
- Alternative 4 – Multi- Strategy Program

After careful consideration of the four alternatives, the parks are proposing a preferred alternative – **Alternative 4 – Multiple Strategy Program**. This alternative appears to most fully balance park objectives with issues of concern, and is also the environmentally preferred alternative. This alternative applies a full range of fire management tools: wildland fire suppression (suppression of unwanted ignitions), wildland fire use (managing some unplanned ignitions such as lightning to achieve natural resource benefits), prescribed fire (management-ignited fires), and mechanical fuel reduction. Alternative 4 proposes levels of fire management activity that will result in meaningful restoration and maintenance of fire as a natural process in park ecosystems. The alternative maximizes flexibility in meeting critical goals while adopting the best available control measures for managing the effects of smoke on public health, and complying fully with Clean Air Act requirements along with other applicable laws and policies.

Under the National Park Service (NPS) Organic Act and the General Authorities Act, as amended, the NPS may not allow the impairment of park resources and values except as authorized specifically by Congress (*NPS Director's Order 55* or *DO- 55*). Impairment is an impact that, in the professional judgement of the responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values. Park managers have examined each potential impact of the preferred alternative and determined that the combination of actions provided for in this environmental assessment will not result in the impairment of any park resources and values.

